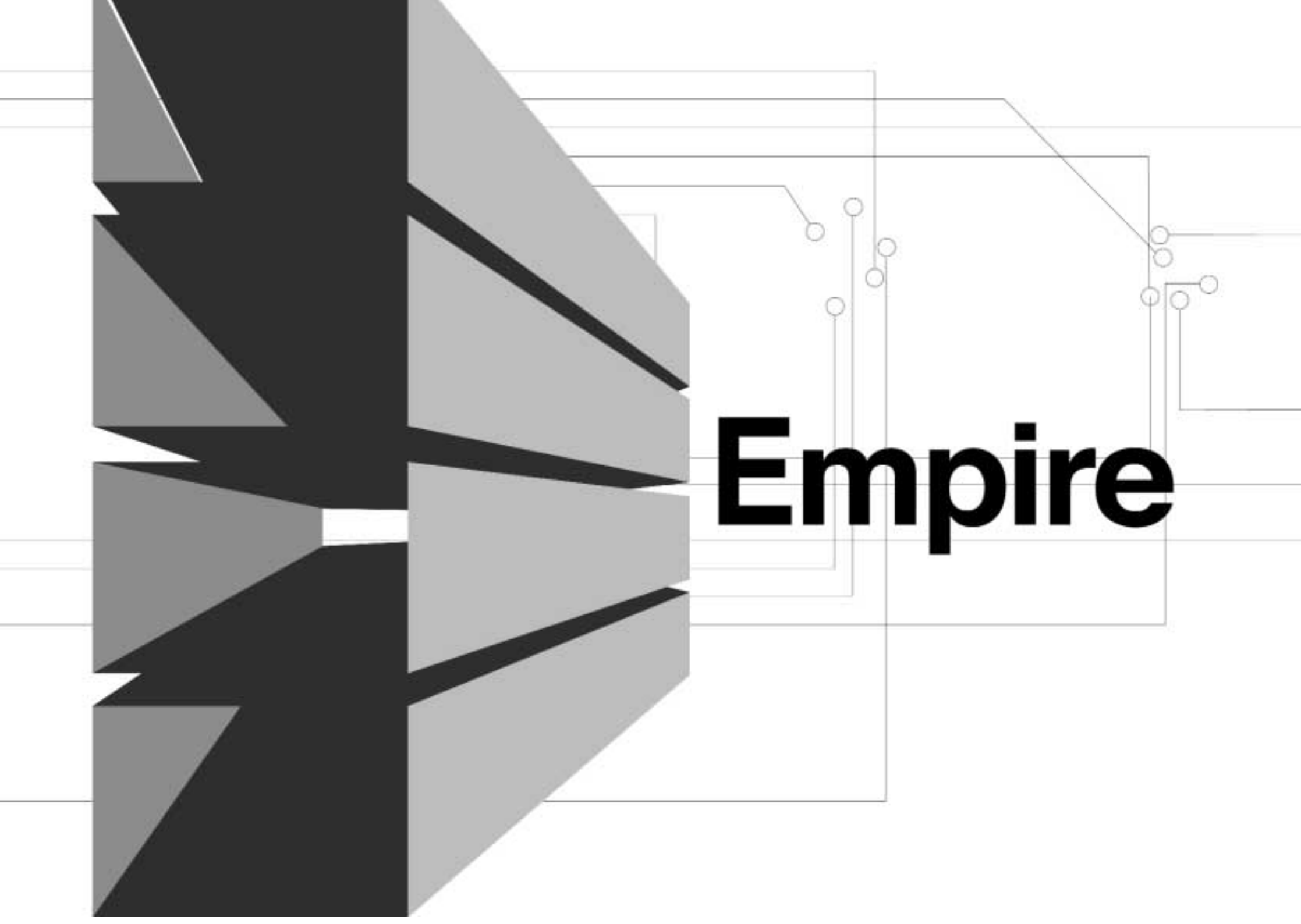
greenpepper
Information
winter 03
5 ecos


Empire

WSIS Calender of Events

OFFICIAL WSIS SUMMIT

The main WSIS Conference will take place 10-12 December 2003 at the giant convention centre Palexpo in Geneva. There will be a special security zone ['red zone'] inside the Palexpo building for government delegates. The summit is hosted by the ITU - a United Nations organisation dealing with technical communication infrastructure - which has contributed to the technocratic approach of the summit. All documents, contributions and statements that have been submitted during the WSIS process can be found on the WSIS site of the ITU:

www.itu.int/wsis

CIVIL SOCIETY

The WSIS has been called a "new kind of summit" because of its "multi-stakeholder approach". A main goal of the WSIS is the participation of all concerned social forces in the summit process, including business and civil society. Given the recent series of summit protests and the lack of legitimacy of large government summits, "multi-stakeholderism" has a crucial role in legitimising the outcomes of the summit. However many of the participating NGOs are becoming aware of this and are getting more critical towards the summit as the preparation process has proceeded.

The Civil Society Bureau facilitates NGO participation in the summit processes:

www.geneva2003.org.

Civil society at the WSIS is self-organised in a variety of working groups and caucuses - including human rights, community media, gender, regions, copyright, and cultural diversity. Find a list of working groups and their mailing lists here:

www.wsis-cs.org

SUMMIT INFO

A website operated by the German Civil Society Coordinating Group offers latest news and background analysis from the point of view of civil society organisations participating in summit processes. Here you can also find the latest civil society documents:

www.worldsummit2003.de and *www.worldsummit2003.org*

Latest news from the summit processes as well as civil society speeches and lobby documents are also available on:

www.prepcom.net/wsis

SIDE EVENTS

ICT4D [Information & communication technology for development] will be a major exhibition next to the official summit. It will take place in Palexpo, 10-13 December. It will house stalls, presentationis, workshops etc. Of particular interest is the African Media Village which will have operational community radio and telecentres:

www.ict-4d.org

The World Electronic Media Forum - to take place in Palexpo 9-11 December - will gather numerous media leaders and officials. A mainstream corporate and public media conference, it is supported by the EBU, International Association for Broadcasters, World Council for Radio and Television:

www.wemf.org

ALTERNATIVE EVENTS

The World Forum on Communication Rights will be a major event at the cutting edge between 'inside' and 'outside' - and thus between participation and fundamental criticism. It will take place 'inside' [in Palexpo, 11 December 2003] but it will focus on issues ignored at the official WSIS - such as media concentration, media propaganda, a critical reflection of intellectual property, etc. WFCR is organised by the campaign 'Communication Rights in the Information Society' [CRIS] with support of AMARC, APC, WACC, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, WSIS Human Rights Caucus:

www.communicationrights.org

The Community Radio Forum [Palexpo, 12 December 2003] will be a similar event. It will launch the study La Practica Inspira on the success of community radios and will present and share experiences of community media from all around the globe. The Forum is mainly organised by AMARC, ALER and Cameco. The Forum is part of a wider range of interesting NGO side-events, including events of freedom of expression, free software, etc. Find more info at:

www.comunica-ch.net

COUNTER EVENTS

WSIS? We Seize! is a series of events around the summit, taking place distinctly outside the WSIS framework [and outside Palexpo, in the Geneva city centre]. It has been organised by a network of media activists and media artists under the umbrella of 'Geneva03'. WSIS? We Seize! will criticise intellectual property, infowar / media propaganda, and a global governance system which is legitimised by civil society organisations. It will seek to develop a different vision of an information society based on participatory and free communication, freedom of movement, horizontality and grassroots approaches. WSIS? We Seize! will embrace:

- a strategic conference on the weekend before the summit,
- a video web-cast 'High Noon' linking Geneva with the rest of the world,
- a Polimedia Lab as a creative space for skill-sharing, workshops, networking, developing practical alternative communication projects.

Read more at:

www.geneva03.org and *www.hubproject.org*

WSIS, the Neoliberal Agenda, and Counter-proposals from 'Civil Society'

Text: Sasha Costanza-Chock
Illustration: Michal Trainin

BACKGROUND ON THE WSIS

The World Summit on the **Information Society** [WSIS] is a UN Summit that is being organized by the International Telecommunications Union [ITU]. The Summit has been constructed according to a so-called 'flower petal' model with a series of regional meetings feeding into preparatory conferences, followed by a two-phase World Summit: in December 2003, Geneva, a Declaration and Action Plan will be agreed upon, and then in 2005, in Tunis, there is supposed to be a review of accomplishments since 2003 and a renewal of commitments by all the participants [see *www.wsis.org*]. According to the rhetoric, each 'petal' [regional meeting, preparatory conference, and Summit] is open to 'tripartite participation', meaning that the governments, private sector, and '**civil society**' are all supposed to have a voice. In theory, then, the Summit is a much more open model for a global forum than most UN meetings or bodies. In what sense, then, is it appropriate or realistic to see the WSIS as another instrument consistent with the neoliberal agenda?

To begin with, it is important to understand that the ITU has always served governments and the powerful telecom conglomerates. Originally set up in 1865 to regulate telegraph standards, later radio, and then satellite orbit allocation, the ITU took on the Summit because it has recently been losing power to the telecoms that increasingly set their own rules and to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers [ICANN], which was created by the US government to regulate the Internet domain name system. The ITU is now facing heavy budget cuts and is desperate to remain a player in the global regulation of Information and Communication Technologies [ICTs]. Given the background of the ITU, it's no surprise to find the clearest vision of the Summit as a plank in neoliberalism coming straight from the horse's mouth. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the ITU, has stated at repeated regional conferences:

Developing policy frameworks for cyberspace to deal with issues of cybercrime, security, taxation, IP protection, or privacy - is something like establishing a new government in the New World. I recall the early history of the colonial states in the USA or the story of El Dorado in Spanish [sic] America. But cyberspace is an invisible world and much more complex. Its inhabitants are not only individuals but include corporations, governments, and even sovereign states. They require new mechanisms for cooperation. We need a much more stronger [sic] political will to solve the issues than our ancestors [sic] did in establishing a state in their newly conquered territories.

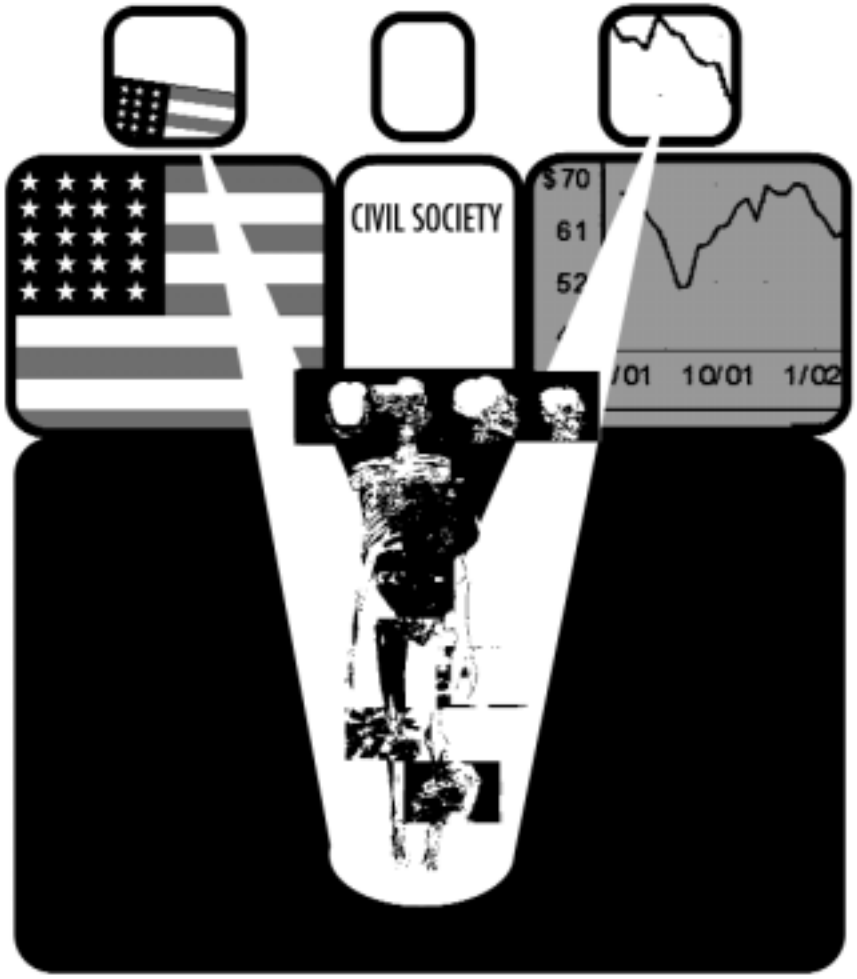
[Bucharest, 7 November 2002: available at *www.itu.int/wsis/docs/rc/bucharest/speech_utsumi.doc*].

We can see from this statement the imperialist mindset with which the leadership of the ITU are approaching the so-called '**information society**'. They are not, of course, the only ones with such a vision. The US position is also clear:

• Crack down on 'digital piracy' in the developing world, in order to maximise profits for the US-based multinational software and media content conglomerates;

• Fight so-called 'cyberterrorism' - in other words, normalise electronic surveillance across the globe and extend the electronic eavesdropping provisions of the USA *Patriot Act* to the rest of the world. [Of course this surveillance capacity already exists in the form of ECHELON (*www.antimedia.net/echelon*), but ECHELON is illegal. The global adoption of an instrument on 'cyberterror' at the WSIS would be a terrible step].

The agenda of the private sector mostly overlaps with and informs the position of the US government: ensure the enclosure of the knowledge commons in the form of Intellectual Property Rights [IPRs] held by corporations rather than creators, and ensure the liberalisation of information and communication



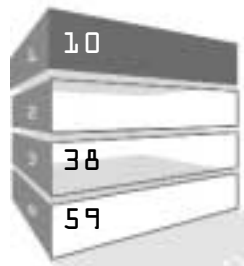
systems everywhere [see the contribution to WSIS Content and Themes by the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors at [*www.itu.int/wsis/docs/im/content_themes/contributions/ccbi.doc*].

To the most powerful actors on this stage, then, cyberspace is a lawless frontier to be tamed and fenced in under the property rights and surveillance regimes. The Summit will envision a rollout of infrastructure across the globe, with lip service to universal access, under conditions that ensure the maximisation of profit for the multinationals and the normalization of the paranoid panoptic pretensions of the USA/UK ECHELON surveillance system. In place of a global knowledge commons, we will have a crackdown on so-called 'digital piracy' in the developing world. In place of the emergence of a strong co-ordinated global **civil society**, we have the chilling effect of state surveillance with the US Empire's war dogs leading the pack towards Total Information Awareness [now renamed 'Terrorist Information Awareness': see *www.darpa.mil/body/tia/TIA%20DI.pdf*].

THE INCLUSION OF 'CIVIL SOCIETY'

Does all this mean that the WSIS agenda is entirely set by the wealthy nations and the private sector? Can it be dismissed as yet another tool of neoliberalism? It's not so simple. For one thing, the most powerful nations and the multinationals have been fairly uninterested in the entire Summit process, sending low-level representatives, if anyone, to preparatory meetings. They seem to be mostly ignoring the WSIS, focusing on other forums like the World Trade Organisation [WTO] and World Intellectual Property Organisation [WIPO] to push the privatisation of information and communication systems.

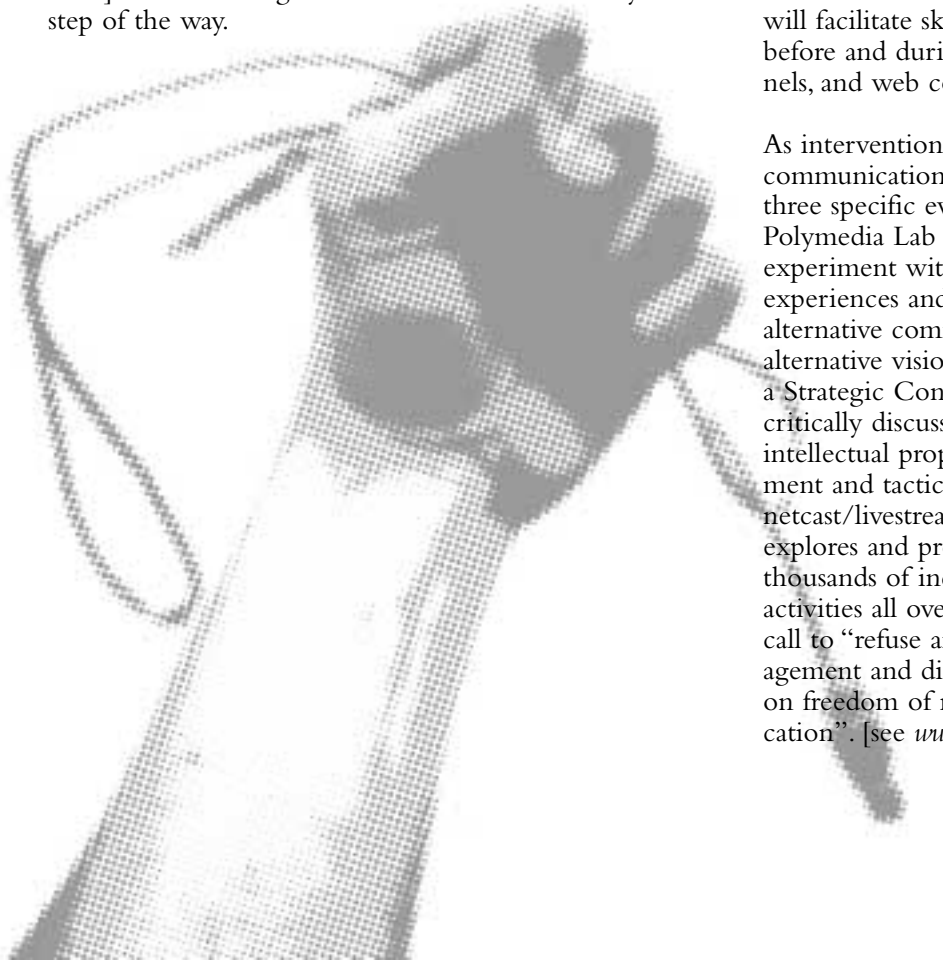
At the same time, there have certainly been positive developments within the Summit process. There have been head nods to '**civil society**' participation, which means some formal accreditation for NGOs and others, and small openings for crafting official UN language. The supposed goal of 'bridging the digital divide' - while at best a naïve formulation that obscures the underlying economic divide that increases as a result of neoliberal policies - is still a positive ideal, and any stated commitment by governments to achieve universal access should be welcomed. There is language encouraging governments to adopt Open Source software



[although not Free/Libre Open Source Software - FLOSS - and anyway this will be blocked for the most part by the US and the private sector]. There is language that emphasizes attention to power inequalities, gender, youth, indigenous, migrants, and other marginalized peoples. We also might expect some funds to be made available for development communication projects as a result of the WSIS action plan; and at least a few of these potential projects will likely be well conceived and implemented – bringing access, tools, and skills to underserved populations.

However, the negative experience so far is also clear: '**civil society**' has been shut out of the process, civil society and the private sector have been formally lumped together [which points to a deep question about the definition of the so-called '**civil society**' itself] and there are few funds for participation by people from the 2/3 world [global South, plus poor and marginalized peoples from the North]. The WSIS is shaping up to be an ineffective talk shop with no teeth. That may turn out to be a blessing, since human rights are not at the core. Crucially, the Draft Declaration section on infrastructure is informed instead by the trickle-down neoliberal vision cloaked in the language of 'enabling market environment' and public-private partnership' - code words for the privatisation of information and communication systems [see the Draft Declaration, section 6, at *www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispcip/td/030721/S03-WSISPCIP-03072*].

To be fair, the whole question of 'civil society' participation has been complicated by the decision to allow individual private firms to register as civil society participants, in addition to their representation by delegates from trade associations [and often, by the government delegates as well]. While Canada, Australia, some African and Latin American countries, the EU, and a few others have all pushed for '**civil society** and private sector' contributions in the form of working papers, China and Pakistan blocked this proposal during both PrepCom meetings. While some countries may be trying to shut out civil society in order to avoid discussion of internal human rights violations, the conflation of the private sector with civil society also resulted in some more progressive national delegates opposing the meaningful inclusion of '**civil society**' on the valid grounds that this would open a back door to greater corporate influence. It is sometimes difficult to sort out which instances of exclusion are due to careful planning by the ITU Secretariat or by national delegates, and which are due to bumbling Secretariat inexperience in dealing with civil society. The upshot, though, is clear: **civil society** [in any meaningful or progressive sense of the term] has been marginalised and excluded at every step of the way.



ALTERNATIVES

In response, a variety of groups have already begun planning alternative,parallel, countersummit, and protest activities around the WSIS:

WSIS? : WE SEIZE! NETWORK

These groups [European Independent Media Centres and noborder groups] met first in April 2003 [along with delegates from the CRIS: **Communication Rights** in the Information Society campaign] to discuss an alternative conference the weekend before WSIS bringing together political and media activists, artists, and cultural workers. They envisaged a space where "the antiglobalisation movements meets the tactical media movement," and that will facilitate skillshares and tactical media laboratories before and during the Summit [with radio, TV channels, and web coverage].

As interventions into the reorganisation of power, communication and information, they have proposed three specific events parallel to the WSIS. First, a Polymedia Lab to "serve as a platform to develop and experiment with horizontal communication, to share experiences and knowledge, to create networks of alternative communication projects, and present an alternative vision of **information society**". Second, a Strategic Convention on the eve of the WSIS to critically discuss themes like migration, labour and intellectual property regimes, '**civil society**' involvement and tactical media resistance. Third, a three-day netcast/livestream to "cast a net around the globe that explores and presents, researches and provides access to thousands of independent and community media activities all over the world". They have also issued a call to "refuse and resist war and infowar, border management and digital rights management, restrictions on freedom of movement and freedom of communication". [see *www.geneva03.org*].

WORLD FORUM ON COMMUNICATION RIGHTS

The Communication Rights in the Information Society [CRIS: www.crisi*nfo.org*] campaign – led by a coalition of international NGO's – have organised a World Forum on **Communication Rights** to be held on the second day of the WSIS [11 December 2003]. This Forum aims to: "demonstrate and document the importance of communication rights for people and communities in an emerging information society; contribute to the emergence and understanding of a coherent concept of communication rights; and generate cooperation in promoting the concept, recognition and realization of such rights". The Forum will address such issues as the public domain and alternatives to IPRs, the public sphere and media, the closure of the internet, the promotion of Free/Libre Open Source Software, governance innovation and grassroots communications technology.

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

In Porto Alegre, participants in the 'media, culture, and counter-hegemony' strand agreed that a countersummit would be important, alongside continued 'inside' participation [see *www.worldsummit2003.de/en/web/190.htm*]. In addition, a discussion has been growing around the possibility of a Thematic Social Forum on **Communication Rights**, perhaps to take place in 2005 as an alternative to the Phase II WSIS meeting in Tunis.

This last proposal takes us to the most important point: if WSIS is best thought of as an organizing opportunity rather than a forum we can really participate in or a body that will have real power, what are we organizing towards in the long term?

BEYOND WSIS: BUILDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR COMMUNICATION RIGHTS

The Summit has thus far excluded 'civil society'. But we can't continue to let the ITU, powerful nations, and the private sector use **civil society** to give a stamp of legitimacy to a thinly veiled neoliberal agenda of privatisation of information and communication systems, privatisation of common resources like the electromagnetic spectrum and satellite orbits, erosion of the knowledge commons, and the elimination of communication rights.

But for those of us trying to build a global movement for **communication rights**, the WSIS is most useful as an agenda-setting event, organising impetus, and news hook - not as a democratic forum where our concerns will be addressed. It is an opportunity to strengthen the links between the anti-corporate globalisation [global justice] movement and the fight against wholesale privatisation of information and communication. The global justice movement can't proceed without tackling this area; and of course, **communication rights** can't be won if the movement stays within a relatively small circle of NGOs, media activists, and academics.

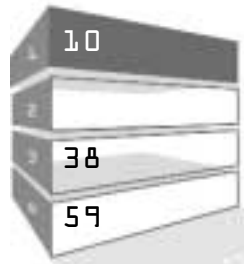
To that end, the WSIS can be thought of as a potential catalyst for us to develop our own global organising process and structure around communication rights. As MJ Kim of Jinbonet has pointed out, the corporate sector has their own agenda: they are focused on IPRs and privatisation of ICT infrastructure, and they lobby hard in every venue. The US has its own agenda, focused on surveillance and cyberterrorism, and they will also lobby hard everywhere. These powerful actors constantly venue-shift, taking the battle from national legislatures to multilateral agreements, from the FTAA to ICANN, from WIPO to the WTO.

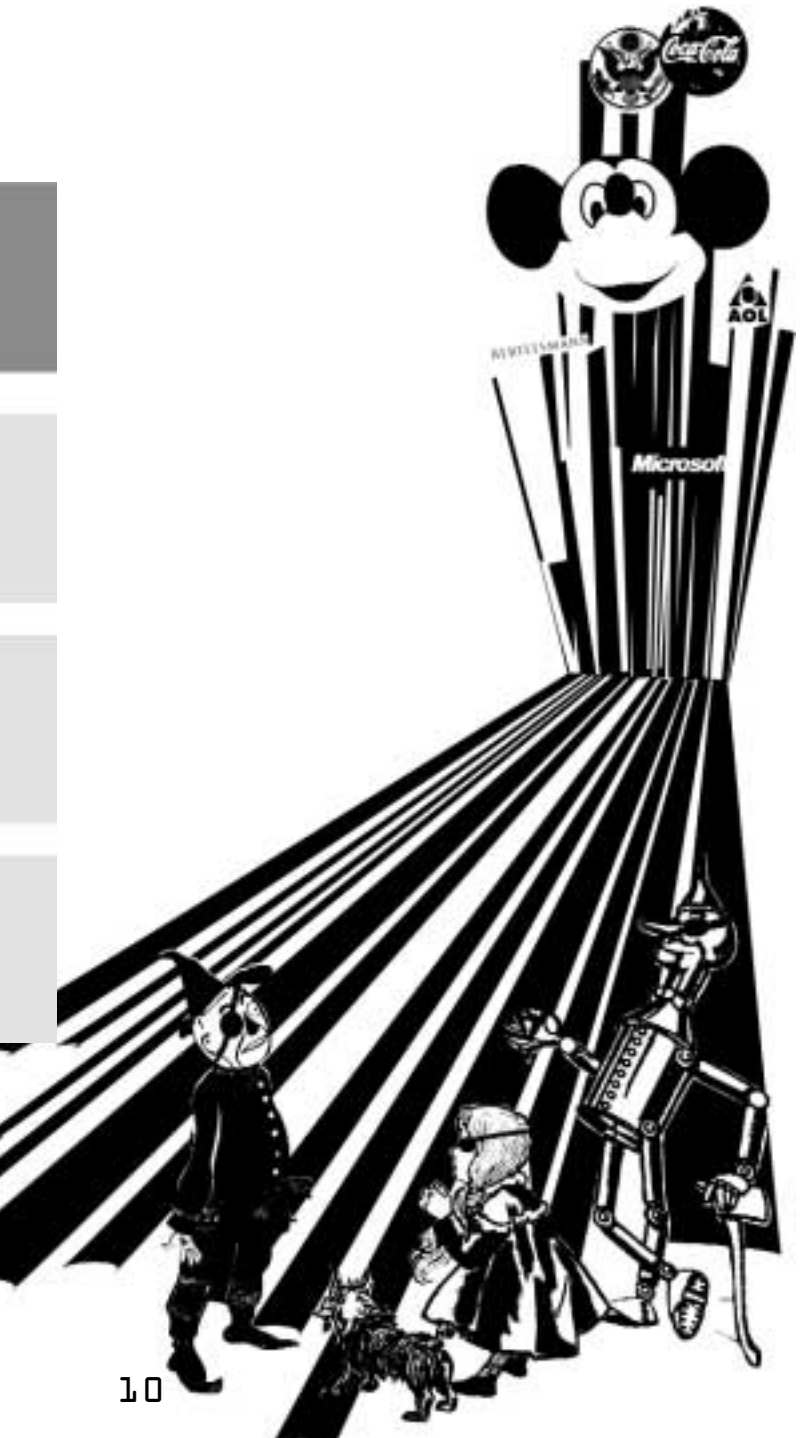
The global justice movement needs its own space to develop a communications agenda, in order to take the fight to each institution, body, and process, and to the streets in front of each as well. In a way, we need our own version of the ITU - an international forum where the network of networks can develop a progressive agenda on **communication rights**, with concrete measures and plans of action. WSIS is an opportunity to launch such a forum; to bring together different generations of media activists, strengthen our networks, and voice clear opposition to both state and corporate control of media and communication systems.

BIOGRAPHY:

Sasha Costanza-Chock is a media artist, activist, and organizer. He has recently finished his MA in communication at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania.

A version of this text was first presented at the OURmedia III forum, Barranquilla, 20.5.2003 [*www.ourmedianet.org*].





Pirate Autonomies

Text: Alan Toner
Illustration: Michal Trainin

PIRATE PRACTICE, INFORMATION INSURGENCY AND ITS LIMITS

Autonomous communications systems require three functional elements: the means of production, transmission facilities and informational raw materials. The spread of the commodity PC has taken care of the first. The second has been confronted through innovative digital techniques - peer to peer [p2p] networks to pool bandwidth and streaming technologies – and through the illegal occupation of the airwaves by pirate radios and more recently street televisions [Telestreet], and in some countries through public cable access and even independent satellite broadcasting initiatives [DeepDish TV, NoWarTV, Global Radio]. The last element has proven the most challenging as access to the audio-visual lexicon that can engage a wider public is constrained by a system of property rights – copyrights and trademarks - that denies the possibility of recycling the works of others - whether to convey our argument or contest that of another. Through repeated use the icons of commercial culture – Teletubbies, Disney Characters, Brittany – permeate our lived social environment and occupy the space of social communication. Without interesting materials people will not watch, listen or read alternative channels.

Whilst appropriation of these symbols is simple enough in the 'underground' environment, legal restraints make it so precarious as to deny the possibility of actually being able to derive substantial revenue from them. Thus, **autonomous** media projects remain stuck in a quagmire of chronic financial insustainability - they can thrive for some years before the lack of resources takes its toll. At this point one of three things happen. Either they professionalise and accept standard market practices [Liberation, Tageszeitung, the Village Voice], become dependent on institutional support [via arts councils or EU funded programs] which have consequences for the political content, or simply disappear.

That said, let's examine some of the socially diffuse forms of **contestation** of the monopoly over cultural totems and the attacks against them.

PIRATE PRIDE

Where are the advocates of freedom in the new digital society who have not been decried as pirates, anarchists, communists? Have we not seen that many of those hurling the epithets were merely thieves in power, whose talk of 'intellectual property' was nothing more than an attempt to retain unjustifiable privileges in a society irrevocably changing?
[Eben Moglen, the *DotCommunist Manifesto*]

Laws expanding the scope and duration of exclusive private rights in information [copyright, patent and trademarks and trade secrets] have been a constant since at least the late 1970s. Growing awareness of the consequences of these laws - combined with the emerging potential for **autonomous** cultural production - has produced a counter-movement in recent years. Initially rallying around notions of fair use - 'a balance between public and private claims' - the demand is now made for information as a 'commons'. This has been accompanied by the unfortunate propagation of terminology that only conveys a movement of enclosure, commodification, information lockdown and panoptical surveillance through a language of dystopia, hopelessness and victimhood. Such despondency would have some legitimacy if the promulgation of formal law from above was enough to con-

trol human behaviour and creativity. However, such a description is false in several key respects and risks being a self-fulfilling prophecy by fostering changes in social norms that flagrantly contradict the law.

EVERYONE IS AN ENEMY

An estimated 150 million people are now using a diversity of p2p systems to share music, video, software, games and text files on a regular basis. Competition within hardware manufacturing and broadband provider sectors is ensuring that access to the necessary commodities – storage space for media, broadband channels for transmission – is expanding. Copyright industry interests anticipated these developments through their experience of software piracy and Bulletin Board based media distribution in the late 80s and early 90s. In the United States one response was the introduction of the *No Electronic Theft Act* [NET] in 1997. Prior to NET, copyright infringement was merely a civil offence if performed for non-commercial purposes. However, the NET law made non-profit distribution of copyright goods a criminal offense - or even a felony - once low thresholds of value and numbers of copies were exceeded.

Jeffrey Gerard Levy, a college student in the US state of Oregon, was the first to be tried under the new law. Levy pleaded 'guilty' of sharing texts and music from a site hosted on his university webserver. Subsequent legislation extended criminal sanctions to the development and distribution of tools devised to defeat 'digital rights management' [DRM] technologies whilst technical measures were integrated into media products to restrict their use. These devices - that the info-tainment complex continue to integrate into hardware - constitute the other thrust of the industry's war against the wave of sharing between strangers.

Another comparable introduction of criminal sanctions occurred in the area of payTV. Since its inception in the early 80s there has been a battle between decryption-card hackers and companies such as Sky, DirectTV and Canal+. Tens of millions of people worldwide use modified cards to avoid payment of extortionate monthly subscription fees. Initially the industry pursued the commercial distributors of the cards, but as this tactic failed they shifted their attention to users. As a result it is now a criminal offence even to receive a decrypted programme – also known as a 'conditional access service' – in your home without the authorised card. Here, as in p2p, the focus of repression has shifted from commercial counterfeiting to individual end-users, their machines and their behaviour in their homes. Once-docile consumers are now to be approached as enemies. DirectTV, for example, are currently threatening action against nearly 10,000 users in the US.

That is the story from above. Let us look instead, with critical eyes open, from below.

CRIMINAL MASS

Heedless of their redefinition as criminals by the global media godfathers and their crooked political friends, there are now an estimated 6 million people swapping media online at any given moment. The Recording Industry Association of America [RIAA] began their jihad with 261 legal actions against individuals in September 2003, after having encountered obstacles in their war against p2p software developers earlier that year. Instead of turning off their computers and returning to shopping as usual, however, users' reaction was one of rage. Boycotts began. Vilification of media companies for their capitalist rapaciousness became commonplace in innumerable forums. One of the victims of the RIAA attack, a 12 year old girl living in social housing in Brooklyn, received so many donations that she ended up making a profit despite having agreed to a $US3,000 settlement with the RIAA to persuade them to drop the case. A legal fund to coordinate and finance collective defence for p2p users was set up at the tellingly titled *www.downhillbattle.com*. Lastly, and most saliently, the sharing went on in defiance of the threat of individualised punishment, with decreases in the numbers on public networks balanced by an increase in those participating in semi-private spaces for exchange and distribution. Despite the existence of the criminal provisions of the NET, they have yet to be employed.

Likewise PayTV hacking continues unabated in both traditional and innovative forms. Sky Italia, launched in July 2003 and monopolist of the Italian satellite market, have sought to use their control over premiership soccer to infiltrate every home with their annual 600 Euro ransom. In response, pirate television operators in Rome connected a television equipped with an authorized card to a transmitter and rebroadcast signals in the clear to whole districts of the city on several occasions throughout autumn 2003. This exemplary action constituted a spectacular intervention into the popular imagination - responding to a real need for a sense of identity felt by Romans, whilst attacking the commercialisation of popular culture by using acts rather than words.

PHANTASMAGORA OF CONTROL: NO NEED TO FEED THE MACHINE

In addition to severe commercial and social problems, the schemes [hardware based copy-control mechanisms] suffer from several technical deficiencies which, in the presence of an effective darknet, lead to their complete collapse. We conclude that such schemes are doomed to failure.
[Microsoft Engineers, *The Darknet and the Future of Content Distribution*]

Technical schemes to foreclose redistribution have fared no better. CSS - the content scrambling system conceived to prevent the copying of DVDs - was reverse engineered. The resulting program DeCSS

provided the key to unlock a large portion of the divx files now available on the web. The Motion Picture Studios vengefully accused and prosecuted a fifteen year old Norwegian, Jan Johansen, with criminal charges relating to the program's development - although he was later cleared of any wrongdoing. Meanwhile the Secure Digital Music Initiative [SDMI] wasted years of research and millions of dollars in an attempt to develop a control mechanism for digital music to no avail. A last prototype profferred to researchers for testing was summarily cracked. In the aftermath, the SDMI attempted to silence researchers from discussing the techniques employed, with threats of legal action under the DMCA, later retracted. Microsoft's DRM also yielded its secrets and flaws shortly after release. Finally, a Russian programmer Dimitri Sklyaraov was arrested by the FBI before thousands of people at the hacker-meet DefCon in Las Vegas 2001. He had just delivered a presentation describing flaws in Adobe's ebook encryption scheme that had allowed his employers' [Elcomsoft] to produce a program capable of circumventing all controls. Charged under the criminal provisions of the DMCA and imprisoned for six weeks in California, charges against Sklyarov were ultimately dropped, but not before a widespread campaign for his release had brought hacker IP activism onto the streets with **self-organised** demonstrations in 14 cities.

That the pursuit of total hardwired control has so far proved fruitless is not to say that this tendency will disappear - as witnessed by the ongoing plans of Microsoft, Palladium and the Trusted Computing Alliance. However, as long as free software systems have machines on which they can function, users will always be able to reassert control over their behaviour and defeat all panoptical devices. This is the fundamental political battle that gives meaning to the free in 'free software'.

IN ALL TOMORROW'S ECONOMIES: THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'PROD-USER' CLASS AND DECOMMODIFICATION

The phenomenal success and complexity of the free software movement has inspired both the study of its means for organising co-operation and a search for other areas where this mode of production finds form. Examples have not been in short supply. At an infra-structural level they range from the **self-organised** storage transmission structures of file-sharing networks to the pooling of hardware resources in projects such as SETI. At the level of knowledge and information production, there are projects such as Wikipedia [a volunteer built non-proprietary encyclopedia] and a range of news and discussion sites [Kuro5hin and Indymedia] built on collaborative writing engines that have become the de facto standard for the organization of opinion native to the web. Science and research has also benefited from the restless curiosity of the army of amateur collaborators.

Hopes that these examples augur a more equitable world rest on the particularity of immaterial resources: non-excludability and non-rivalry. The first means that the cost of the provision of a good is the same if it's produced for a limited number of people as for all. The second means that your ability to enjoy a given good does not impede my use of it at the same time. Each of these projects demonstrate the advanced state of **self-organised** production in the networked environment and its capacity to subtract goods and services from a free market model built on the market and the firm. As the range of its productive practices grows, it substructs or removes tasks from the market and the firm. Instead of 'management' or 'planning' these projects rely upon horizontal negotiation, modular production and exploitation of the cheap and easy nature of digital communications to overcome the need for a centrally located decision-maker - the boss. Widespread social co-operation is no longer constrained to the firm - this is the fundamental change created by peer to peer networks. A superior result is possible through creating access to a near infinite range of expertise and paralellisable workers throughout the network.

QUALIFICATION: OUR INVISIBLE LABOUR FOR CAPITAL AND STATE

The fact that the fruits of this collaboration - like the warez in circulation on file-trading networks - are free does not mean that they sketch future liberation. Such a conclusion could only proceed from a naïve belief that capital accumulation only operates where there is a fee for access. Service and knowledge industries, however, are based precisely on extracting value on the back of free or cheap access to a basic product.

Some degree of pirate circulation of media commodities, for example, is desirable from an accumulation perspective as it ensures that the profile of the film, song, software or game reaches a broader community. In software this means that young designers train themselves in using Photoshop and Quark Express - programs which later in 'professional life' they will continue to use and will pay licensing for, due to the inconvenience of learning alternatives. Similarly the Matrix may be downloaded and viewed for free but the public excitement generated will help to sell t-shirts, posters and a hundred other spin-offs. Counterband circulation in this sense can be the perfect accompaniment for the efforts now commonly made by companies to add allure to their products by integrating 'street-hip' - enlisting marketing and cool-hunting agencies to keep them close to their desired demographic. In a world where retail price has no relationship to the cost of physical production, every positive description of cultural objects participates in the creation of a market for sales of the product

directly or some derivative thereof – the mobilisation of our subjectivity in the profit-cycle.

Likewise the benefits of networked voluntary labour do not only accrue to music-collectors, free software users/producers and humanity in general. State and commercial apparatus get their cut as well. Clear examples include the common practice amongst gaming companies of using enthusiastic players as 'guides' to help new enthusiasts find their way around the game, overcome cul-de-sacs created by bugs in the code and generally create a sense of community. Effectively these guides provide free customer service which the company itself would otherwise have to finance – in fact, this aim and result is boldly stated by games companies themselves.

Elsewhere NASA operate volunteer projects that harness free labour for banal techno-scientific tasks formerly requiring the attention of PhDs. What are those people now working on? The next Manhattan project?

FURTHER EXCAVATING THE POTENTIAL FOR LIBERATION: EXCARCERATION

An important meaning of liberation …. [is suggested]… the growing propensity, skill and success of …. working people in escaping from the newly created institutions that were designed to discipline people by closing them in. This tendency I have dubbed 'excarceration' because I wish to draw attention to the activity of freedom in contrast to its ideological or theoretical expressions.
[Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*]

The street finds its own use for things
[William Gibson]

Notwithstanding their possible recuperation by models of accumulation, these illegal practices constitute a positive rupture with dominant culture in a way not dissimilar to drug use or illegal movement across borders. Consciousness of being outside or against the law opens a space for questioning the rest of this world. There is a more precise connection between this mass 'criminality' and the emerging productive power. The desire to obtain media commodities for free drives self-education and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge by users: how to use cryptographic hashes, compression techniques, wider knowledge of less-charted [and thus safer] network spaces, port-management, network architecture, search algorithms, familiarity with formats and the ability to render digital forms as physical objects such as mastered CDs and DVDs, familiarity with publishing techniques, wikis etc. File-sharing forums function as veritable apprentice-yards for the diffusion of techniques that once acquired are portable to uses outside of the reproduction of the commodity circuit. But these practices do not address the economic problems of challenging a media system which is based not only on formal control of the broadcast infrastructure but on a massive marketing and advertising apparatus that creates celebrity.

Whilst much of current pirate sociality revolves around consumption, the proliferation of the necessary skills for digital production and distribution allow us to anticipate the possibility of a more contestatory appropriation. That is the choice: to take the master's characters and cultural icons embedded in everyday sociality and repurpose them to tell new stories contesting the present and offering the possibility of organising the world in a different way. This is what Harry Cleaver has elsewhere referred to as self-valorisation, or:

those aspects of struggle which [go] beyond mere resistance or negation… These practices of reappropriation that act in disregard to the law and the social relations that law fixes, … the search for the future in the present, the identification of already existing activities which embody new, alternative forms of social cooperation and ways of being.

Today's pirates can be tomorrow's agents of transformation - authoring both their lives, and ours, anew.

REFERENCES:

Anon, Telestreet Rome -Giving Sky the 'Boot', at *http://slash.autonomedia.org*

Biddle, England, Peinado, Willman (Microsoft). The Darknet and The Future of

Content Distribution, *crypto.stanford.edu/DRM2002/darknet5.doc*

Yochai Benkler, Coase's Penguin,or Linux and the Nature of the Firm, 112 Yale , Law Journal (2002-03)
Harry Cleaver, Kropotkin, Self-valorization and the Crisis of Marxism,

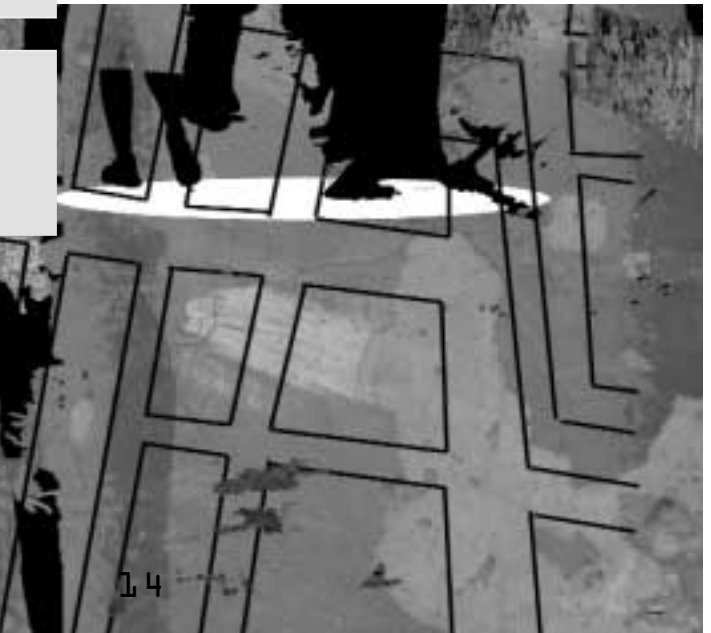
Anarchist Studies 2(1994): 119-35
Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century, (Cambridge Univ.1992).

WEBSITES:

[*http://www.2600.org*]
[*http://www.v2v.cc*]
[*http://www.ngvision.org*]

Info-Action: Info-Espai Experience

Text: Info-Espai
Illustration: Steffanie Elwanger



In this text the Info-espai would like to share our experience practising Info-action and researching the routes and mechanisms for information autonomy as a political and cultural struggle.

INFO-ESPAI EXPERIENCE : COLLECTING AND DISTRIBUTING USEFUL INFORMATION FOR TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

During the past few years we have witnessed an explosion of new social movements emancipating themselves from hierarchical society and traditional politics though new forms of assembly and **network-based** organisation.

These **social movements** have been able to appropriate new information technologies to help transform their organisational forms toward more decentralised, horizontal and participatory models, and to develop projects that extend horizontalism and network culture toward a new way of organising society.

As part of the same culture of sharing and co-operating with regard to information and other aspects of life, we think it is necessary to develop projects that facilitate alternative forms of social connection that affect peoples daily lives [communication, food, housing, economy, work, health, education, etc.] like, for example, what is happening in Argentina.

We often find that these projects depend too much on the voluntarism of a few, which is inconsistent with what we want to achieve. At the same time, there is a lack of co-operation in the creation of shared resources that reduce costs and make our diverse projects viable and therefore sustainable.

Info-espai is an ambitious attempt to respond to these challenges by promoting networking, co-operation and the creation of synergies.

We want to offer and sustain a useful system of information and knowledge production for transformative projects.

Specifically, we want to provide sustainable outreach tools for collectives and groups who build these projects so they don't have to depend on the mass media - thereby liberating information essential for building a co-operative, participatory and **network-based** society.

A number of groups are already operating within Info-espai in pursuit of these objectives:

MOVIMENTS.INFO

A webpage full of resources for social transformation with a collection of all the useful information about **social movements** in Catalonia.

Moviments.info publicises and facilitates access to tools, collectives, projects, struggles and campaigns and is constantly updated.

Some of the elements you can already find there include:

• a directory of more than 2,700 Catalan collectives. Each collective can access their information in order to add things or make changes. A system of key words facilitates the search.

• a space for the collective construction and updating of useful resources. This is the section of Wiki pages.

• the news section - which attempts to collect all the latest information about campaigns, resources and projects undertaken by collectives that work for social transformation.

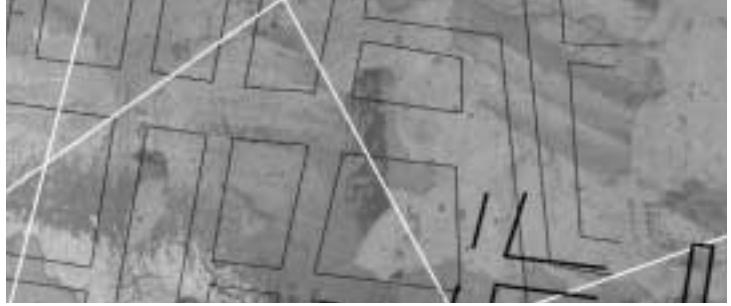
• the digital version of the book Useful Guide 2003 for social transformation.

PHYSICAL INFO-ESPAI

The physical Info-espai offers a telephone and in-person service during the morning and afternoon. We offer outreach services for calls to action, projects, campaigns, demonstrations. We also produce useful outreach materials such as the Guia Util, neighbourhood maps, and notebooks with tools for participation. We work in order to give human resources and other kinds of support to projects and mobilisations that work towards increasing and strengthening the network and its connections.

GLOCAL RESEARCH SPACES

Space of experimentation for activist social research - that is, action-based and action-promoting research by, and for, **social movements**. Open Research useful for its practical effectiveness is created collectively and for free use. **Glocal research** spaces are spaces of information, convergence, reflection and intervention. This space aims to intervene by creating tools that socialise knowledge for social transformation whilst simultaneously promoting exercises in collective theorisation.



EDITORIAL PROJECT

The Info-espai editorial project is conceived as a tool for transmitting knowledge created through the daily practice of **social movements**. We want to serve as a bridge so this knowledge circulates and is shared. It is a copyleft project – a knowledge without an owner. Paper, web, and CD are the formats used to circulate content and we use what is most relevant in each case in order to spread the information as far as possible. We are open to proposals that, for lack of a better word, we call free. The only thing we ask is that its goal be radical social transformation and that it begins and remains a horizontal project.

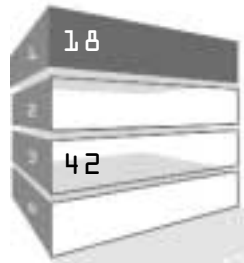
MOVIMENTS.NET SERVER

In moviments.net we are working to offer e-mail, list-serve, webpage services and other tools for internet-based collaborative work to ensure that all people and individuals working with **social movements** can leave behind the services offered by Internet transnationals [hotmail, yahoogroups, etc]. All services from moviments.net are with free software in order to promote its use and as a non-commercial form of conceiving the internet.

DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

The principal objectives of the Info-espai documentation centre are based on the principles of using, administering and publicising our own materials - including those generated for Info-espai as well as all information we receive from outside the centre. We also aim to centralise the social movement collective catalogue project. The collective catalogue project will create a catalogue that can be consulted on-line in order to access document archives from the diverse social movement centres in Barcelona. If we want to know about a particular issue, a search on the collective catalogue will point to all the available information about that issue and in which centre it is located.

For knowledge about Free Use, Let's Liberate Information!



Interventions in the 'Information Society'

an interview with
the Critical Art Ensemble

GP: What differences do CAE see between digital and analogue forms of communication and information? How important do CAE think this digital / analogue distinction is in understanding the logic of control in 'information societies'?

CAE: We view this distinction on a cosmological scale. The digital builds order from order, while the analogue brings order from chaos. As fundamental ideological principles, the type of control that is expected from a society changes relative to which principle is believed to have greater value. The disciplinary state is analogue. Just what the digital state will look like in terms of its representative system of control is still uncertain. Its normativity and law is still in formation. Complicating this matter is the fact that the political-economy of the most developed states and the global political economy are hybrids. Capitalist forces are still in a state of struggle over the disciplinary constitution of the digital. The conflict over the legal and social status of intellectual property among capitalist institutions is a clear example.

GP: Jointly considering the 'digital divide' and the dialectical difficulties tied up with the axiomatic capitalist revolution of means, what do CAE believe to be effective contestational strategies ?

CAE: One consequence is the return of avant-gardism and an increased burden on rogue technocrats and the intelligentsia. The 20th century's flash point ofpeasant revolutions now seems unlikely to occur and is limited to spasms of uprising. Part of the reason for this development is technological separation.

This division leaves us with a terrible problem of organisation. The old methods of local organization that formed atomized communities into a united front or a stable coalition are now only a beginning. This body must also be armed with digital communication. This is why redundant technology initiatives have been very helpful in both colonial and endocolonial struggles.

Organizers not only have to reconfigure social formations, but plug various groups into appropriate networks. From this point, local struggle potentially has global representation, and may proceed to disturb the symbolic order. Of course, no guarantees are offered. Most efforts are consumed in the noise, clutter, and misdirection of the spectacle in part designed to block such activity.

GP: What are the directions of **appropriation** under pancapitalism? Who appropriates whom?

CAE: This is the question, isn't it? We have to remember that any foray into pancapitalist institutions is at best a negotiation. One always has to give something. A calculus of utility exists here. Can a resistant party get more than it gives, and disappear before the exploited party realises its error? **Appropriation** is multidirectional. Anyone can use it to some degree. The question is who can appropriate that which is most valuable, and how long can they hold it. Even in the most disciplined locations, value stays fluid, and therefore is vulnerable to unexpected **appropriation** and disturbance.

GP: How - under these conditions- do CAE regard technologically hybrid communication systems and the importance of a subjective local perspective on the **appropriation** of space for social organization?

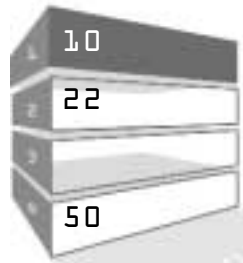
CAE: Local response to contested global issues is of key importance, and is the most meaningful in terms of tactical possibilities; however, **strategic action** is more difficult. The assumption that local and global resistance always exists in harmony is treacherous. One thing that identity politics/the politics of difference has shown is that micro and macro politics can be and often are in direct contradiction. As one proceeds toward the general/the strategic, contradictions become aggravated as different hierarchies of value come into contact. This is a problem that still has not come to any resolution - much to the sorrow of the left.

GP: Do CAE think that certain artistic practices could play a role in developing resistant formats of social practice? What do CAE consider to be the importance and/or flaws of a qualitative aesthetic critique?

CAE: 'Artistic practice' is perhaps too narrow a band. 'Cultural practices' would be a better term.

Intervention into the material order is essential, but that alone is not enough. The realm of the symbolic is also a key site of intervention. The sign has functions under both the principles of equivalence and of exchange value. As long as this remains the case, the empire of signs cannot go unchallenged, and cultural intervention is useful in this task.

In general, the flaw of aesthetic critique is really its limitation - it cannot move beyond the symbolic. It has a tremendous impact on subject construction, tactics and methodology, and the modeling of resistant territories. But it is weak in effecting areas of social formation and organization and concrete political and economic structure.



Activist Research

Text: Glocal Research Space
Illustration: Kernow Craig F4L

The period of effervescence of social mobilization that we are currently passing through is accompanied - most distinctively in Europe and Latin America - by the proliferation of experiences with multiple trajectories emerging from the intersection of political action and investigation – experiences we might frame as 'activist research'. They are inspired by practices like the Latin American action-participant investigation, the Italian Conricerca [co-research] and 'worker-and-metropolitan survey' and/or the French institutional analysis. Are they, then, passages towards a new form of commitment and antagonistic subjectivity?

In this text we would like to bring into consideration and invite exploration of a series of elements that 'swarm' around what could be understood as activist research. It is not our intention to give a closed definition, or to present what we believe is - or should be - activist research. Neither will we enter into a debate about the validity of this concept and its relationship to other concepts with a similar meaning.

ELEMENTAL SWARM

There are different interconnected elements relevant to activists focused on social research:

• Research from the action of transformative social movements. Research implied by the needs that are directly or indirectly expressed by the social movements and other excluded sectors of the population.

• Research carried out from our own situation - that is, from our own experience choosing a strategy of partiality from below.

• Nomadic and/or travelling research, adapting to changes.

• Research towards the action for the critical transformation of the present reality. Research that pursues the creation of a knowledge that is valued for its practical effectiveness in generating changes as opposed to an objective and contemplative theoretical knowledge in the traditional academic fashion. That is, a knowledge that gives visibility to conflicts that can then be added - like other elements - to social mobilization; a knowledge that generates and maximises action; a knowledge that transforms reality whilst generating a new reality and whose fruits serve the process of constituting new antagonistic subjectivities.

• Research springing from the relation between the subject-investigator [the investigator as subject] and the subject-investigated in a composition process - that is, non-instrumentalist research that investigates without an 'object'. Rather than treating social movements as objects of investigation, social movements - as well as the investigators - are subjects in a process in which everybody is left reconstituted. It is not 'about' Social Movements but rather from and for Social Movements in immanence - that is, rather than locating it-self on a position already codified, it produces the terms of the situation.

The traditional role of the academic-investigator that is questioned is that of the prudently distant, supposedly

'objective' and individualist specialist. In contrast, subject-investigators participate in the situations investigated, are open about their motives and opinions, and are not necessarily people with a specialised university education.

• Research from the consciousness of resistance rather than one that is merely communicative. It is not to 'give' voice to the excluded populations but to establish co-operation whilst acknowledging our own exclusion from the outset. It is not research constituted through a separated consciousness, but rather research as a tool used to confront the system that excludes us.

• Research as a strategy of re-appropriation of knowledge and self-defense in front of the apparatus of academic capture – an institution that inevitably reproduces power relations.

• Research in a process of collective creation that is nurtured by a spirit of experimentation.

• Research with use value that uses the reference methodologies of action-participation and/or co-research.

• Non-disciplinary research that looks for the overcoming of the fictitious academic compartmentalisation of reality. On the contrary, reality is understood as a totality that combines manifold interconnected aspects.

• Research with a glocalist [global + local] dimension.

• Research that generates free, public, inclusive and non-discriminatory knowledge in accessible formats for universal use - without property, copyright or mercantilist aims. It denounces the mercantilisation and privatisation of knowledge as one of the primary causes of social exclusion.

• Research that is developed like an effective procedure. Its development is in itself already a result.

• Research organised under the principles of: decentralization, horizontality, autonomy and the will for coordination and cooperation. It is either developed by subjectivities created through the explicit objective of doing activist research or developed transversally and integrated in other social movement scopes of action.

OPENINGS AND POSSIBILITIES

Questions surrounding the practices of activist research can be met by opening a series of debates: What role and relations do the subjectivities of activist research establish with the transformative social movements of which they are part? How is knowledge generated by social movements? In what respects is this knowledge different to the knowledge generated in the academy or other institutions? Does activist research require the formation of groups with this distinct aim or can it be developed transversally and integrated in the other acting ambits of the social movements? How did these questions arise?

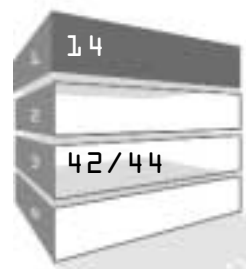
Given the relations with the academy in several points, some further questions clearly pose them selves: Is it possible - and if so how - to make an instrumental use of the academic institutions for the benefit of activist research? What are the perverse effects of the academy studying social movements? What roles do academics play in the mechanisms of power - such as the re-absorption and division of the movement into physical activists and theoretical activists, or between non-violent and violent activist? What resistant practices initiated by social movements can be used against the academy? And inversely, from the position of the academivist - someone active in the social movements that, because some personal and/or collective strategy, forms part of an academic institution – is it possible to contribute to the transformation of the academy through ethically-based practices? More broadly, is it possible to carry out activist research from an academic institution? Do we establish synergies with the fights against those at the academy?

ACTIVIST RESEARCH AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS INTERNATIONAL MEETING

These issues will be discussed, debated and organised within the framework of the Activist Research and Social Movements International Meeting to take place in Barcelona [Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris] on 22 – 25 January 2004 [see *www.investigaccio.org*].

The objective of this meeting is to establish a space of encounter, exchange, self-formation and debate from the 'social movements' in relation to activist research/investigation. We invite all of those people and collectives that are interested in [re]creating, [re]thinking, [re]inventing and [re]appropriating these knowledges and creating 'activist research/investigation' to participate.

This initiative comes from a group of people who do research from/of social movements - some from autonomous/self-run spaces



and others who work in closer relationship to academic institutions but that try to overcome the narrow marks of academicism.

We want to fill the content of the conference according to the interests of the participants. To do this we will begin an on-line collective debate [both on the listservs and on the interactive website]. We would like to offer spaces in which groups can confront/meet, like tables of debates and 'workshops', as well as things like plenaries where we can share information and learn collectively. We believe that in order to take the most advantage of the time we have, we should omit grand presentations and dedicate ourselves directly to confrontations and discussions. There will be no official language for the meeting. However, we will have a system of simultaneous radio circuit translation-interpretation in place.

These meetings are usually autonomous/self-organised and for this reason we are trying to produce the least amount of expenditure as possible. We are currently debating the eventuality of having to put a small minimum inscription fee [to cover primarily the costs of food and materials]. We are also looking to have a small amount for basic expenses for the workshops as well as for providing small travel scholarships to those who want to come but cannot afford to.

It is of prime importance that we have collaboration in the entire process of defining the meetings. So visit our website, get in contact with us, inform individuals and collectives that would be interested and get involved in what you can. We will see each other in January!

SOME LINKS TO GROUPS DEVELOPING SOCIAL ACTIVISM RESEARCH:

Universite tangente: *www.universite-tangente.fr.st*
Bureau d'études: *http://bureaudetudes.free.fr/*
Transnational Institute: *www.tni.org/*
Copenhagen Free University: *www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/*
Derive Approdi: *www.deriveapprodi.org/*
Facoltà di fuga: esperimenti di formazione autogestita: *www.rekombinant.org/fuga/*
Shifting Ground: *www.shiftingground.org*
We are everywhere [Radical publication]: *www.weareeverywhere.org*
Centre for Research on Global movement [in former Yugoslavia]: contact - *zapata@sezampro.yu*
Colectivos Situaciones: *www.situaciones.org/*
Universidad Nomada: *www.sindominio.net/unomada/*
Social research space Glocal - Infoespai: *www.infoespai.org*
Arxiu Arran: *www.arran.org*
Eco-concern: *www.pangea.org/ecoconcern*
Universidad de las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo: *www.madres.org*
INURA [International Network for Urban Research and Action]: *www.inura.org*

SOME LINKS TO CONFLUENCE SPACES:

Activism research and social movements international meeting: *www.investigaccio.org*
European education forum: *www.eef2003.org*
Mobilised Investigation: *www.manifestor.org/mi*

www.greenpeppermagazine.org